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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2037
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 0873
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DAKAR 000313

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PU](#) [SG](#) [XY](#)

SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES ASSASSINATIONS
WITH FORMER FIRST LADY

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARCIA BERNICAT FOR REASONS 1.5 B/D

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 12, Ambassador and Emboffs met in Dakar with Isabelle Vieira, the widow of former Bissau-Guinea President Joao Bernardo Vieira, and close family friend, Pierre Goudiaby Atepa, an adviser to the Senegalese President. Atepa and Mrs. Vieira asked for the United States to investigate the assassinations in Guinea-Bissau, saying that any effort conducted by Bissau-Guinean entities would not be credible. Atepa claimed that one of Vieira's killers was a member of the commission of inquiry set up to investigate the murders. He accused the Prime Minister and the leader of the military commission in command of the armed forces of being involved or responsible for the assassinations and he suggested former President Kumba Yala and Portugal might be complicit as well. He said narcotics trafficking and any efforts to reform the military, which is currently dominated by the Balanta ethnic group, were motives for the murders. The Ambassador assured Atepa and Mrs. Vieira that the United States supports seeing a credible accounting of what occurred and that it would be more appropriate for the USG to participate in an African-led international inquiry. See SEPTEL cable for more information international community efforts and requirements to support them. End summary.

¶2. (C) On March 12 Pierre, Pierre Goudiaby Atepa, architect, informal advisor to President Wade and close friend of the Vieira family contacted the Ambassador to say he had urgent information to pass regarding the assassinations of President Vieira and former Bissau-Guinean Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Batista Tagme Na Wai, and that former First Lady Isabel Vieira wanted to meet with the Americans. Ambassador, PolCouns Mosby and DATT Madden met with Mrs. Vieira and Atepa for two hours discussing the assassinations and the family's suspicions about who is responsible.

Guinea-Bissau Investigative Commission Not Credible

¶3. (C) Atepa informed us that President Abdoulaye Wade had given him responsibility for coordinating matters on Guinea-Bissau (and Atepa,s neighboring Senegalese region of the Casamance), including providing him with a plane to bring Vieira's family to Dakar. He said that the Senegalese, like Mrs. Vieira, were convinced that the recently established Bissau-Guinean commission of inquiry into the killings would be ineffective because of a basic lack of investigative capacity. He noted that none of the political assassinations in Guinea-Bissau's history had ever been solved or resulted in a conviction based on similar commission efforts. Atepa added that the commission also would be hamstrung by the inclusion of a military nurse named Chiam, who is called "Doctor" and is alleged to have mutilated President Vieira with a machete among the military,s representatives.

Request for U.S. to Conduct Investigation

14. (C) Atepa asked in the name of the family for the United States to conduct the investigation to ensure its credibility. He commented that Senegal could not get directly involved because of the risk that Guinea-Bissau could retaliate by provoking trouble in the Casamance. The Ambassador responded by praising the actions taking by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to date in the aftermath of the assassinations. She told Atepa that it would not be appropriate for the United States to act unilaterally, but that the USG was supportive of the idea of an internationally-led international commission of inquiry, especially one organized by ECOWAS. The Ambassador assured him that the United States also wanted to see a credible accounting of what had occurred and why, noting that the Legal Attache and his deputy were already in Bissau to offer preliminary assistance to the investigation.

15. (C) Atepa granted the need for African leadership, but expressed little confidence in ECOWAS (or the United Nations), complaining bitterly that Vieira had requested security assistance from both organizations as well as the Community of Lusophone Speaking Countries (CPLP) without success following the November 23 attempt on Vieira's life. Atepa repeated a claim EmbOffs have heard frequently in the last week that several people were in hiding in Bissau and in Dakar because they fear for their lives and urged the United States to be actively involved in any investigative effort for the sake of their safety as well as finding the killers. Atepa informed us that he had removed the machete used to

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torture Vieira from the crime scene, brought it to Dakar and turned it over to the Minister of Interior. He requested that the FBI examine the evidence for fingerprints to prove Chiam's involvement. EmbOffs noted that U.S. forensics efforts would be aimed at developing a set of facts surrounding the two killings that could aid the wider investigation. Atepa urged the Ambassador to speak directly with President Wade, who was aware of EmbOffs, meeting with Atepa, about the assassinations and made a call on the spot to arrange a meeting (currently scheduled to occur at 1800 local time on Friday, March 13).

Accuses Prime Minister Gomes of Being Involved

16. (C) Atepa in the name of the family not/not the Senegalese government accused Bissau-Guinean Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior of being implicated in the assassinations. He recounted the long, personal and well-known animosity between Vieira and Gomes, describing Gomes as a man who was &manufactured8 by Vieira and whose personal wealth was in part due to Vieira's assistance. Atepa claimed that Gomes appropriated property belonging to the Vieira family following the 1998 civil war and Vieira's departure into exile. According to Atepa and Mrs. Vieira, on the night of the assassination of Na Wai, the Prime Minister twice refused to attend a meeting convoked by the President with the Minister of Defense and the service chiefs, citing concerns about security. However, Atepa believes the real reason Gomes refused to attend the meeting is that he knew troops from Mansoa were already en route to execute the President, ostensibly in retaliation for the death of Na Wai. Atepa noted that after the assassinations, Gomes as well as the rest of his cabinet never contacted or spoke with Mrs. Vieira to offer their condolences or aid with funeral arrangements, with the exception of Foreign Minister Adiata Nandigna.

Accuses Captain Zamora Induta is the Mastermind

17. (C) Atepa said that he and the Vieira family believe that

Captain Zamora Induta, vice chief of staff of the Bissau-Guinean Navy and seemingly self-appointed interim leader of the military commission currently in command of the armed forces, is the mastermind of these events. Atepa suggested, however, that several other actors may be involved. He noted that Gomes, accompanied by the Ministers of Defense and Interior, traveled recently to the Gambia without informing President Vieira, implying that Gomes did so to meet with former Chief of Staff of the Bissau-Guinean Navy, Admiral Bubo Na Tchute, who is known to have been actively involved in narcotics trafficking and was accused by Tagme Na Wai of having planned an attempted coup d'etat in August 2008. Na Tchute is also suspected by many of having been implicated in the failed attempt to assassinate Vieira in November 2008. Atepa commented almost for effect, "It seems to me that (former President) Kumba Yala is involved as well. He indicated that Yala's former Minister of Interior Ernesto Carvalho is resident in Dakar and allegedly in regular communication with Yala in Morocco and various individuals in Bissau, including narcotics traffickers. Atepa completed his list of key suspects by including the Government of Portugal, primarily given their apparent lack of concern for the manner in which Induta (who was reportedly trained in Portugal) took control of the military. Echoing the opinions expressed by a number of senior Bissau-Guinean government and military officials, Atepa said that, in addition to the threat posed by steps to stem drug trafficking, any effort to reform the armed forces would be regarded as a threat to the military leadership and could have provoked plotters to remove Vieira and Na Wai. Atepa stated flatly, however, that neither leader had been actively involved in drug trafficking (Note: According to several sources, Na Wai was attempting to crack down on military involvement in drug trafficking and had begun to embrace security sector reform shortly before his assassination. End Note.)

Zamora in Charge

18. (C) Induta by his own actions has at least indirectly implicated himself in the assassinations. By his own admission, he and his fellow second-tier officers deposed the established military succession and hierarchy only hours after the death of Nai Wai, claiming they did so because the service chiefs "did not take the initiative." Induta also

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made an announcement shortly after Na Wai's death that President Vieira was responsible, a statement he later tried to modify. Observers speculate that the Balanta (the overwhelming majority of military members, ethnic group) officers were unwilling to allow the non-Balanta Army chief of staff to become interim chief, as prescribed. (Note: Reportedly the Navy chief of staff is Balanta, but not regarded as capable End Note.) Moreover, Induta seems to have quickly established himself as the de facto armed forces chief of staff and even apparently presented himself as such initially. The Balanta officers have subsequently met and confirmed Induta as their candidate to be the next armed forces chief of staff. The speed with which Induta has established his position suggests he took time to prepare the way for his coup within the military.

19. (C) Atepa also illustrated Induta's control by recounting that the family met with the Prime Minister to negotiate burial arrangements for Vieira. The family proposed three options: 1) bury Vieira in or next to the mausoleum of independence leader and national hero Amical Cabral; 2) bury the remains abroad in Cape Verde, Belgium, France, or Senegal; or 3) bury him in the Vieira house where he was murdered, transforming it into a mausoleum. Atepa and Mrs. Vieira said the Prime Minister told the family representative to seek authorization from interim defense chief Zamora. Zamora responded that all three options were out of the question and the President would be buried in the municipal

cemetery "like everyone else." Atepa and Vieira,s widow also claimed that the military tried to block one of the former President,s daughters from making brief remarks at the funeral, but that interim President Pereira overruled the decision.

No Sense of Danger

¶10. (C) Shortly after the assassination of Na Wai, the President held a meeting on March 1 with the Minister of Defense and the service chiefs, as well as other senior officers including Zamora Induta, during which he supposedly asked for them to account for the security breach: "How is it possible that someone put a bomb in staff headquarters without any of you knowing?" The President held a second meeting with the same group later that evening. Shortly after the departure of the Minister of Defense from the second meeting, the troops from Mansoa arrived. At that time, several of Vieira's advisers and other staff were present in the house, two of whom are receiving treatment in Dakar for their wounds. According to Mrs. Vieira, neither she nor President Vieira ever considered leaving the house following the assassination of Na Wai, though several confidants contacted him to raise concerns about his security. When asked why, she and Atepa said that he did not want to run because he had done nothing wrong. Mrs. Vieira seemed particularly puzzled as to why the President would have run given his supposed innocence.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) It is clear that Atepa and the Vieira family have an agenda; they hope to enlist the United States in their quest for answers surrounding the death of President Vieira and by association that of Wa Nai. Nevertheless, much of what Atepa and Mrs. Vieira said tracks closely with numerous conversations that EmbOffs have had over the past week and half, including with Bissau-Guinean cabinet and senior government officials, as well as resident diplomats and international organization staff. When asked by PolCouns if he thought Prime Minister Gomes knew before hand that Vieira was about to be assassinated, the Minister of Defense replied "Yes," believing that was the reason Gomes chose not to attend the meetings at the President's home. The Prime Minister is also described as being close to Induta, who campaigned with Gomes during last November,s legislative elections. For his part, the Prime Minister told Ambassador and EmbOffs that he did not go to the meeting because he felt that it was foolish to meet with the military, given that some of its members had just assassinated Na Wai, until the situation could be clarified.

¶12. (C) Induta is not likely to be able to duplicate Na Wai,s level of control of the military, primarily because of his age and the fact he is not a combat veteran. Atepa alleged that there are tensions between Induta and the commander of the Mansoa battalion, Colonel Antonio Njai, who has reportedly been nominated by the military to be the vice

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armed forces chief of staff. Instead, Induta, who has skipped several ranks in his career, appears to have risen to the top as a result of sheer ambition and because he is better educated)- a rarity in the Bissau-Guinean military -- than many of his rivals. Induta is more likely serving more as a chairman of the board, than chief executive officer at this point, suggesting further upheavals within the military could be in the offing. Although none of Emboffs, interlocutor's could provide any proof, most believe drug traffickers are involved in the deaths of both leaders in some way, whether in the form of logistical and technical support (i.e., providing the bomb that killed Na Wai), or more actively as architects of the assassinations.

¶13. (C) The case against Prime Minister Gomes is less compelling. While his ties to Induta could infer his involvement in some way, it is difficult to understand why plotters would need to bring him into a conspiracy. It is perfectly plausible that Gomes stayed away from the meeting out of a general fear of instability in the aftermath of Na Wai,s death, however, it is equally plausible that he received a call from his friend Induta warning him to stay away (and without further explanation). While constitutional form has been followed regarding civilian rule, it does not appear that the Interim President and Prime Minister remain as unable as their predecessors to exercise command and control over the armed forces. Also disturbing, discussions with senior Bissau-Guinean figures also indicate that ethnic tension is on the rise as a result of events that strongly suggest the length to which the Balantas might go to retain control of the military. According to the Minister of Defense, the country is increasingly at risk for a potential outbreak of ethnic violence. End comment.
BERNICAT